

# **ADDENDUM**

## **RV Owners Lapsed/Non-User Summary**

Focus Groups with  
Recent Users and Lapsed/Non-Users  
of Texas State Parks  
Contract #177796

**August 2007**

*Attracting Texas Residents to Texas State Parks*

*Conducted for:*

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department  
Austin, Texas

*Conducted by:*



## **RV Owners (Lapsed/Non-users) Target**

### ***Respondent Profile***

A focus group of RV lapsed/non-users was conducted July 19, 2007 in Houston.

- Ages 41-66
- Own an RV (4 5<sup>th</sup>-wheels, 3 pop-ups, 2 motor RVs, 1 travel trailer)
- Stayed 3+ weekday nights in their RV at a park in the past year
- Have not stayed at a Texas state park in the past 2 years
- 5 members of an RV club, All RV with family or friends
- 2 African-American, 8 Caucasian
- 8 Males, 2 Females
- 5 retired or semi-retired, 5 employed (not a screening criteria)

### **RV Camping: General Perceptions, Usage and Decision Factors**

#### Perceptions

- Top-of-mind images when thinking of overnight camping in their RV were not focused on the enjoyment of nature and specific sights/sounds, but on being able to get away and having the convenience of taking your own home with you, sleeping in your own bed, having your own space. In addition, the camaraderie and social interaction came to mind.
- Images and photos representing RV experiences communicated varied depictions of the outdoors (fishing, children, cooking outside), freedom and versatility (can go when/where you want).

#### Usage and Habits

- Lapsed/non-user RV campers have stayed at numerous campgrounds and parks and of their favorites, about half were outside of Texas and one was a Texas state park (Eisenhower). Few seemed to be able to immediately name a clearly favorite park.

They tend to think of places with water and beaches and/or shade trees

- Appealing features of their “favorite” parks focused on the terrain and setting of the park and a few were excited about parks with resort-type amenities (Concan and Key West):
  - On the coast or lake for boating and fishing and swimming (children)
  - Campsites are close to the water feature
  - Resort amenities such as golf, spa, patios and decks, hammocks, etc.

- When RV camping, lapsed/non-users of state parks:
  - Half (retired) tend to prefer weekdays (Sunday–Thursday) to avoid the crowds and half (employed) RV owners typically camp weekends.
  - Most seem not to think of one particular place or destination when planning a trip in their RV.
  - A few have RV trips that are event-driven (motorcycle rallies, festivals, etc.)
  - No clear favorite time of year for RV camping was represented, although many tend to prefer more moderate temperatures. Because of the flexibility many enjoy, they can go to any part of the state or country to enjoy their preferred weather conditions at any time of year.
  - Most camp with their spouse, some with their children, and others with friends (some will meet other friends with RVs at the parks)
- Weekends are always considered more crowded, and those who work will start the weekend early (Thursday) to obtain a good site and avoid the Friday or Saturday check-in/arrivals.

#### Decision Process

- The importance of factors in deciding which RV park to use varied significantly depending on if it were a one-night or week-long stay.
- For one-night stays at a park, ease of set-up was critical, as indicated by the top factors below.
  - Level pads/gravel or concrete
  - Convenient access
  - Pull-throughs
  - Restrooms/showers

Other factors mentioned, but less critical for one-night included:

- Full hook-ups
  - Wi-Fi
  - New places to try/new experiences.
- For week-long stays at a park, different factors rose in importance:
    - Full hook-ups
    - Lots of amenities, pools/kid activities
    - Resort-class amenities
    - Electronic amenities (Wi-Fi and cable TV)
    - Allow pets

- Going/doing what the group/family wants

Some conveniences associated with setting up the RV became less important (level pads, convenience/access, pull-throughs) with longer stays.

- Price was not mentioned as a major factor in their RV camping decisions.
- Information sources used when planning RV camping trips are varied, and include:
  - Internet
  - Word of mouth (most important for those in RV clubs).
  - *Woodall's*
  - Good Sam Club
  - AAA/GPS
  - KOA
  - Passport America

A few would get alternatives from guide books (*Good Sam's*, *Woodall's*) and evaluate the alternatives based on the websites of the specific parks.

## **Texas State Parks**

### Awareness and Usage

- A few have favorite state parks (Garner – but doesn't RV in the park, Brazos Bend and Galveston) but most have limited experiences with Texas state parks and no real favorite.

About half could not name a Texas state park they had used for RV camping. state parks mentioned included: Galveston, Brazos, Garner, Sam Houston, Eisenhower and Lake Corpus Christi.

- None are highly likely to consider a Texas state park for their RV camping. The primary deterrents are:
  - Lack of familiarity (*"They don't publicize it"*)
  - Lack of availability/difficult reservations
  - Out-dated facilities
- Information about state parks came primarily via word-of-mouth. Others mentioned signage on the road, online search (to learn more about a park they knew was there), TV shows about state parks, and a Texas tourist book.

- About half have used a state park in the past year for non-RV camping activities, typically fishing and picnicking, but also photography, biking.

Those who had not visited a state park in the past year (for any reason) indicated that state parks didn't match with their interests for water and they were too far away/not convenient.

### Image of State Parks

- RV lapsed/Nonusers seemed initially hesitant to share top-of-mind images of Texas state parks. Images that came to mind were a mix of positives and negatives:
  - Larger parks
  - Very scenic
  - More privacy
  - Rangers, and safety
  - Some have nice restrooms
  - Limited access
  - More remote
  - Sites that are no level
- Only one was satisfied with RV camping at a Texas state park. Most were (or thought they would be) moderately satisfied.

Although the facilities were lacking, RV owners perceived the wildlife and natural environment as superior. Some simply had lower expectations of state parks, and so were not as strongly dissatisfied.

*"I know not to expect full hook-ups, waiting in line to dump, good power supplies..."*

*"What brings it up to a 5 rating from a 1 is...sitting down in the evening watching the prairie dogs."*

- Dislikes and negative experiences shared were numerous, focusing primarily on the poor facilities, but also the difficult reservation process and lack of availability of RV sites, such as:
  - Old, outdated
  - Made for tent campers/RVs don't fit
  - 30amp service rather than 50 amp
  - No sewer hook-ups
  - Old hook-ups
  - Leaking faucets
  - Long lines for dump stations

- Difficulty getting reservations
- Can't get enough sites for a RV club
- Not all parks have RV sites
  
- Not conveniently located/"off the beaten track:"
- No convenience store

*"You know it's like they really don't care for tall rigs, fifth-wheels...And trees are another thing I did not mention...A lot of places I wonder how do they expect you to get in there."*

*They're more geared to tents the best that I've ever seen, because the sites are old that they built. And the sites that they do have on the water or the ones I've been to were built 70 years ago when somebody was pulling a 15-foot trailer, nothing against the pop-ups, I like all of them, but I mean if you're pulling a fifth wheel or you're driving a motor home you don't fit in there anymore."*

*I've only been to two state parks but in comparing them with private camps and RV Parks is that there is no convenience store on site."*

*"I don't know I agree with Larry. I think they're kind of, they're older. A lot of times you start to hookup and water faucet may not be working. They do have a lot of old hookups it seems like at the state parks."*

*"And they just aren't as maintained as well (as national parks). I mean I'm talking about your camp site. They pick up stuff in the park, they keep the roads open, the Rangers are always nice but your hose bib is broke, your electrical doesn't work, not, it's not level. "And shoddy power. Power is just...."*

*"Just mostly you have to park on the grass or, or gravel, there's no concrete slabs on any of them."*

*"I think too that most state parks I've been in they don't offer a pavilion or a facility where you can have a group party. So it really makes it a difficult choice. If it's nice weather and it can be held outside, fine but sometimes it just gets too hot even to be outside you want some shade..."*

- While many dislikes and negative images of the state parks were discussed, several respondents recognize that Texas state parks offer some features and advantages that other parks and campgrounds do not, such as:
  - More natural setting, wilderness, wildlife
  - Larger than private camps
  - Hiking and biking trails
  - Rangers
  - Evening programs (but don't know about them till you get there)

*"Well when I think state parks and I think the only thing that differentiates, the difference between state parks and other places that we go is the open space, the space. If you go to resorts and RV Parks you you're together in a parking lot - stuck."*

*"Yeah, whereas state parks you may be off in a corner all by yourself. So that's the one thing that I like about state parks."*

*"Then you, the safety comes into that too because the Rangers are always there. If we ever had a problem I mean it was taken care of like that."*

### Increasing Usage of State Parks

- Suggested changes to increase RV camping typically focused on upgrading the site facilities, such as:
  - Level pads (less critical to those with small trailers/pop-ups)
  - Full, reliable hook-ups
  - Good power
  - Larger spaces, large enough for larger RVs and trailers with slide-outs
  - Develop facilities and volunteer programs to attract retired "full-timers" (comparable to national parks)
  - Improve/monitor reservation process that doesn't require lengthy advanced planning (complaints that can't talk to a person, reserve online and hope someone emails you back, takes half a day to get through, unable to make spontaneous decisions (e.g., call in while on the road)
  - More sites available
  - Promote/offer evening program, nature trails, activities, hike and bike trails

Cost is not a critical issue to most of the lapsed/non-users, but some criticism was heard of the pricing structure.

*"If you have the things on there that people talk about, the basics on private campgrounds and RV parks, and apply a lot of that to the state parks, you would bring a level where they would be able to compete. Again, I can see that the cost of the state parks would probably be closer to the private campgrounds but that's the price that we're all willing to pay. We're willing to pay the 60 bucks a night to stay at a camp and get all of those facilities."*

*"Well one of the reasons Joe and I stay at the national parks is because there is a, you can apply for a Golden Age Pass and the national forest and you get your, everything's half price no matter how long you stay. That's the only time we were even worried about the price, if we're going to be there a week or so. And that's great, so we usually look for that. If the state parks did it I'm telling you I'd go to a lot more of them."*

*"That's another thing that you brought up I'd forgot about. When you go to lots of state parks they want to charge you by the head. And that's not a good thing. They just started to do that just start doing that a few years back. And it's no, no."*

- Most were not interested in a state park for groups or day outings, citing deterrents of distance and lack of facilities for large groups. Informing them of 9 state parks within 60 miles of Houston was surprising, but only a few indicated they were likely to “check them out.”

Some interest was expressed in visiting a state park if there were a specific historical or scenic feature to see, but they would dislike being charged “by the head.”

*“I’m not going to pay \$50 for me and my kids to go stare at a few squirrels and then go home.”*

- Information that these RV campers would find helpful from the state parks include:
  - Facilities available
  - Easier reservation process now available (if changed)
  - Updates on programs, events, activities available
- The best source to receive this information is through email with updates and newsletters (that campers can sign up for on the website).

Other suggestions included

- *Texas Parks and Wildlife* magazine,
- Links/advertising on RV camping related websites
- Advertising in RV directories like *Woodall* and *AAA*,
- TV advertising



## Reactions to Concepts

*Note: Respondents were made aware that there are a number of state parks within 60 miles, which may have contributed to higher interest.*

### Yurts

- Interest in Yurts was very minimal because they preferred staying in their RV. Those who had some interest felt it would be convenient (not have to haul the RV/trailer), cozy and romantic, or could be rented for additional space/kitchen when RVing.

They would expect to pay \$10 a night. One who was familiar with yurts (“I’ve *always wanted to stay in a yurt*”) would pay \$25.

### Group Facilities

- A few were interested in renting a group facility, thinking of RV clubs, company meetings and family gatherings. Expected rental fees were typically \$20 to \$100 a day.

### Outdoors Workshops

- Half were interested in participating in outdoor skills workshops, thinking it would be good for their children, nephews or grandchildren. Interested participants expected to pay \$10-\$20 per person.

A suggestion was made to hold the workshops in town rather than at a distant park.

### Summer Camps

- Interest in weeklong overnight summer camps for children was minimal. Most did not have children that age, but thought it might be a good idea. Those with children did not think they would trust sending their children overnight to a park with people they did not know. However, a few (parents and grandparents) would be interested if the camp could be combined with a family camping trip to the park.